

Healthy Relationships Guide



*A Guidebook for Youth by Youth
from the Wisconsin Youth Advisory Council*

December 2018



Introduction

Wisconsin's State Youth Advisory Council (YAC) is made up of members from across the state who are or were in out-of-home care and are also active on their local council. These youth donate their time, unique perspectives, and individual passions and skills to advise the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families so together we can better serve, represent, and engage youth currently or formerly in out-of-home care.

In 2018, the YAC members identified "healthy relationships" as one of their areas of focus. Members wanted to create a guide to help youth maneuver different types of relationships. Specifically, a guide to help other youth:

- know what can be challenging and what can be beneficial;
- know what a safe and appropriate relationship looks like and should include;
- understand the importance of boundaries;
- know how relationships can be impacted by personal experiences (including trauma); and
- recognize how healthy relationships with others affects personal wellness.

This resource includes YAC members' reflections on many different types of relationships, from familial to friendships, professional to personal, and, perhaps most importantly, with oneself. While this guide cannot cover everything, its contents . . .

. . . are genuine and relevant

. . . in the words and styles of the youth who crafted it, and

. . . can best speak to the importance of engaging in healthy relationships during and after time in out-of-home care.



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Professionals



The youth who focused on healthy relationships with a professional offered concrete advice on what you can expect from your interactions with professionals. It is important for you to be able to trust and get information and updates from your worker, therapist, or other professionals – and to know what options you can pursue if that professional is not fulfilling their duty and not helping to meet your needs. Keep in mind that sometimes, a specific need or goal cannot be met, but that should be explained to you with as much information as possible.

- Begin by discussing potential boundaries that could come up (seeing your worker out in the community, social media, etc.) so you know what those boundaries are and the expectations of what to do
- Build professional boundaries with trust and responsibility of all parties involved, allow for power and control on each side when possible
- Allow interactions to be kind yet professional in order to maintain healthy boundaries
- Focus on our strengths but also realize our barriers in a thoughtful way
- Help create a team of important people in our life (support system of personal and professional individuals)
- Allow professional relationships to be objective, with as much of a clean slate/fresh start as possible
- Learn rights while in court-ordered care (foster care, group home, RCC, etc.)



Siblings



The youth who focused on healthy relationships with siblings and foster parents/out-of-home care providers created two pro and con lists regarding challenges and benefits you can expect from these relationships. Not every youth in care will experience every thing listed on the following pages, but you may be familiar with the impact – good or bad – of the things that are identified.

Pros

- Being with family
- Stress free environment
- Catching up
- Not missing out on each other's growth
- Building unification
- Getting to see your siblings
- Strong bond
- Building up relationships
- Motivation
- Activities
- Privacy
- Helps you live for something
- Having someone to confide in
- Talking to someone you trust
- Having your siblings look up to you
- Building character
- Having a role model
- Inspiration
- Feelings of being home
- Memories
- Building trust
- Not alone
- Safe
- Special moments
- Unconditional love

Cons

- Not enough time
- Fights
- Things can get sidetracked
- Unhealthy sibling relationships
- Transportation
- Siblings have different parents
- Not worker's priority
- Parents don't support
- Different cities
- Death of a parent
- Multiple siblings (separation)
- Charges (jail time)
- Unclean/unfit living conditions
- Supervised visits
- Not being able to go places
- Separation anxiety
- Not able to use WiFi/technology to communicate
- Not able to eat meals with siblings
- Strict parents
- Workers do not always keep up contact
- Information about siblings may be unknown
- Privacy is not always possible

Foster Parents



Pros

- Sharing homes
- Safe homes
- Bond over food
- Able to repair relationships with biological parents
- Having someone to trust
- Visitation
- Activities
- Getting out of the house
- More money opportunities (great financial stability)
- Stronger support system
- Staff relationships (*applicable to group homes)

Cons

- Trust issues
- Bad homes (difficult to build connections)
- Money hungry foster parents (they are only in it for the money) (motivated by the wrong reasons)
- Basic needs unmet
- Lack of affection
- Foster parents treat biological kids better
- Don't get along with other kids in the home
- Staff of group homes
- Maturity levels vary
- Having to share rooms
- Controlling
- Unhealthy homes

Yourself

Overall Wellness

Imagine yourself as a garden. You have to take care of each flower in its own way and give the individual flower your own undivided attention. Because if you're inattentive towards at least one flower, the whole garden won't be able to reach its full potential of beauty. You have to be able to know yourself in order to grow yourself. Give yourself that undivided attention.



Youth who focused on having a healthy relationship with yourself did so by weaving a discussion of concrete ways to work towards different types of wellness with artistic reflection and expression. They used the analogy of a garden to illustrate the importance of prioritizing good self-care and kindness in order to thrive.

7 Dimensions of Overall Wellness

- Social wellness
- Emotional wellness
- Spiritual wellness
- Environmental wellness
- Occupational wellness
- Intellectual wellness
- Physical wellness

Social Wellness

*Who am I with you?
Who am I when I'm alone?
What standards define me?*

"Speak to people genuinely and see the way people's attitude towards you improve. Be able to speak with others with the same energy you'd like to receive, because the way you present yourself is the way people will respond to you."

Emotional Wellness

*Are you happy when you smile out to the world?
Is it genuine?*

When you wake up in the morning, are you eager to start a new day? Are you thankful that you got to open your eyes to new opportunities? Ask yourself when you open your eyes ready to start your day? Am I doing this out of hostility, responsibility, or genuinely?



Spiritual Wellness

I've been here before
Something out of this world
Put hope in my soul

We all have something we pray to, a idol made from thy mind. That's too complex, too understanding and forgiving of your insecurities. When blessings occur, you look up at the sun and let the warmth soothe your pain.

Environmental Wellness

*Do you care about the Earth as much as yourself?
Or more of yourself?*

If you mistreat the environment that surrounds you, it's impossible to be a healthy you. Don't forget that you live on this earth too.

Occupational Wellness

*Does work make me, or
Do I make work, work for my
precious little time.*

Why work so hard just to have money sit in an account, just to watch the numbers rise to an infinite amount? Allow yourself to make time to restore yourself, the person you never thought you could be.

Intellectual Wellness

Foolish or Wiser
Evolution is a thought that changes history.

"Playing checkers, is like knitting which is like drawing that's similar to solving sudoku. How a mind in motion makes possibilities possible."

Physical Wellness

*Run harder push push push
A body stronger than will heals an aching heart*

Imagine your body a temple and inside there's a tree. A very sensitive tree. A tree who couldn't defend its leaves and branches. If the tree had a weak temple, it would be very easy to burn down. But a strong temple, can take a fire and protect the beautiful tree inside.

Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD)



This profile on Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD) put together by youth members details one example of how experiences early on in life—even some that are impossible to remember—may affect your ability to create healthy, meaningful, close, and/or positive relationships with others, both in during childhood and into adulthood. For more information about the impact of trauma and the overcoming of it, you can research things like Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), protective factors, and resiliency.



Reactive Attachment Disorder is diagnosed in the young ages of nine months and five years, caused by, but not exclusive to:

- Neglect and Trauma
- No available bonding in infancy
- Basic needs for emotional safety left unmet

How it can affect adulthood

- RAD can lead to relationships issues, feelings of mistrust, extreme insecurity and in some cases, mental illness.
- RAD also can lead to feeling emotions on extreme spectrum ends, such as no emotions or too strong of emotions, sometimes leading to extreme anger or depression.
- Control issues or impulsivity can result from RAD symptoms, which potentially involve legal and social consequences.

There is Hope!

- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy can address the root of trauma and create healthy coping mechanisms for those who suffer from RAD.
- Adlerian Therapy addresses the behaviors leading to extreme actions and how to habit healthy skills for dealing with RAD.

Not sure where to find help?

- Contact your primary doctor or mental health provider and ask about RAD.
- If you already have a therapist, ask them about Reactive Attachment Disorder as a former foster youth and if you might benefit from Cognitive Behavioral or Adlerian Therapy or any other alternatives.

Friends



The youth who focused on healthy relationships with friends specifically considered the power of positive friendships to reinforce overall values in life, as well as the influence that peer pressure can have. Peer pressure, they explained, can be both positive – by serving as a source of encouragement – or negative – by that encouragement being directed at unhealthy or risky behaviors.

Signs of an unhealthy relationship

- Friends that lie to you
- Drug usage
- Arguments that are not settled fairly
- Pressure to quit positive activities/change interest toward negative

What's necessary for personal boundaries

- Personal space
- No lying to each other

Peer pressure

Where do you experience peer pressure?

- Through social media
- School
- In social settings

What are the benefits of peer pressure?

- Try new positive things like sports and clubs

What are the negatives of peer pressure?

- Feeling uncomfortable
- Doing negative things like drugs, daredevil tricks, and other unhealthy behaviors



Resources

Take a look at these other great resources that talk about healthy relationships!



Healthy Relationships Toolkit

<http://www.health.utah.gov/vipp/pdf/DatingViolence/Student%20Toolkit.pdf>

Healthy vs. Unhealthy Relationships

<http://depts.washington.edu/hhpccweb/health-resource/healthy-vs-unhealthy-relationships/>

Healthy Relationship Workbook

<http://arcwhatcom.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Healthy-Relationship-Workbook.pdf>

Characteristics of Healthy & Unhealthy Relationships

<https://youth.gov/youth-topics/teen-dating-violence/characteristics>

Healthy Relationships in Adolescence

<https://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/adolescent-development/healthy-relationships/index.html>

For more information on this document or the local and state Youth Advisory Councils more generally, please contact DCFILCoordinator@wisconsin.gov.